



MEDIA RELEASE

Public Affairs Office
Commander
U.S. Atlantic Fleet
1562 Mitscher Avenue,
Suite 250
Norfolk, Va. 23511-2487
Office: (757) 836-3600
Fax: (757) 836-3601/3732
clfmedia@navy.mil

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release 015-03
July 18, 2003

SUPER HORNET FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT RELEASED

NORFOLK, Va. -- The Secretary of the Navy has released a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for introduction of the F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet to the east coast of the United States. The document contains two preferred home basing alternatives, each recommending split basing of 10 Super Hornet squadrons at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Va., and at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point in North Carolina. The FEIS also recommends construction of an Outlying Landing Field (OLF) in Washington County, N.C. for use in practicing aircraft carrier landings.

Atlantic Fleet Commander, Admiral Robert J. Natter, has recommended the Secretary of the Navy select the alternative that calls for basing eight Super Hornet squadrons (96 aircraft) and one Fleet Replacement Squadron (24 aircraft) at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Va., and two squadrons (24 aircraft) at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point in North Carolina. The second preferred alternative contained in the FEIS recommends basing six squadrons at NAS Oceana and four at MCAS Cherry Point. Both alternatives recommend construction of an Outlying Landing Field (OLF) in Washington County, N.C.

The recommended basing alternative maximizes existing facilities and limits capital investment requirements at both NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point, providing substantive mitigation of environmental impacts at both sites at an acceptable cost. The geographic proximity of the two bases allows for combined use of training ranges and OLFs by all Super Hornet squadrons as well as other aircraft based in the area.

The Washington County OLF site was recommended because it best fit the screening criteria the Navy used in considering candidate sites. These criteria included a low population density and a lack of airspace conflicts and obstructions (such as tall towers), as well as avoidance of extensive wetland complexes, public interest areas and ecologically sensitive areas. With its central location between MCAS Cherry Point and NAS Oceana, an OLF located in Washington County provides the greatest potential as a valuable training asset for current and future years.

The Navy considers the OLF essential to supporting fleet readiness. In order to meet national security requirements resulting from Operation Iraqi Freedom and the ongoing Global War on Terrorism, the Navy is now required to prepare multiple carrier strike groups for short-notice deployments. Existing airfields at NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point, and the Navy's OLF at Fentress do not have the capacity to meet future short-notice deployment – or surge – training requirements. This surge requirement makes a second OLF essential.

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SUPER HORNET FEIS
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“This OLF is very important to fleet readiness. The War on Terrorism and the way we will prepare and deploy carrier strike groups in the future demand that we maintain a much larger portion of the fleet in a surge-ready status,” said Admiral Natter. “The existing airfields at Oceana, Cherry Point and Fentress don’t provide adequate capacity to do that in a way that is safe, responsive and sustainable. An additional OLF is essential to our ability to train our aircrews and surge our forces when directed by the Commander-in-Chief. A new OLF will also improve training quality. The Navy’s present OLF at Fentress does not permit realistic carrier landing training due to residential growth around the airfield. Our pilots have had to adjust their flight pattern altitudes around existing homes and experience degraded night training as a result of residential lighting. The proposed OLF will provide realistic carrier landing training in an environment free of such limitations.”

The public will be allowed to review the FEIS for a period of 30 days in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Following this review period, the Secretary of the Navy will issue a record of decision regarding Super Hornet homebasing and OLF site selection.

The Super Hornet is an evolutionary upgrade of the combat-proven F/A-18C/D Hornet, fully capable of conducting both air-to-air and air-to-ground combat missions. This includes air superiority, day and night strike with precision guided weapons, fighter escort, close air support, suppression of enemy air defenses, reconnaissance, forward air control and refueling. The Super Hornet has greater range, can carry a heavier payload, and has enhanced survivability and built-in potential to incorporate future technologies. The aircraft performed superbly during Operations Southern Watch and Iraqi Freedom.

The text of the FEIS is available online at <http://www.efaircraft.ene.com> or at public libraries in the affected areas.

Media inquiries regarding the proposed action should be directed to the U.S. Atlantic Fleet Public Affairs Office (757) 836-3600.

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Also attached to this release is a copy of the endorsing letter Admiral Natter sent to the Secretary of the Navy explaining why he made his recommendations and a letter, from Admiral Natter, to the editors of North Carolina and Virginia media.